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Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools

QCEC submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training

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The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian Schools, which will inquire into and report on the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia's public and private schools.

This submission is made on behalf of the 22 Catholic school employing authorities and the 288 Catholic schools in Queensland. Some of the individual schooling authorities and teacher librarians may choose to make separate submissions.

Background

Teaching and learning in schools is achieved through the complex interaction of people and physical structures. School libraries are included in this. As there is the tendency to variously term school libraries as 'resource centre', 'information service centre' a statement of what is meant by a 'school library' in this submission becomes necessary.

In a similar way to all libraries, school libraries house books, periodicals, sound and digital media. As well as being physically located within a school, it is usual for the school library to be in just one site but this does vary across schools. A school library is similar to other libraries in its use of resources to engage, entertain and develop individuals through its resources. However school libraries are unique in the intended focus on the curriculum of the school – to enhance, expand and support the educational framework of the school. It is this immersion in the teaching and learning that results in the challenge that faces school libraries at this time. With the shift to greater use of digital systems to facilitate learning and information resourcing, the physical needs of school libraries are changing. There is a trend to less reliance on the hard copy

resourcing to that of digital and electronic forms. Collaborative and cooperative learning supported by digital media is emerging as a role of the modern school library. This brings with it the growing need for meeting spaces to support library service provision and hence the requirement for larger library space to incorporate seminar and meeting rooms.

The terms 'teacher librarian', 'school librarian' and 'librarian' are all used in the *terms of reference* for this inquiry. Given that a teacher librarian is a dual qualified, experienced teacher with postgraduate qualifications in teacher librarianship, and a school librarian or librarian is a qualified librarian with no teaching qualifications, it will be assumed for the purposes of this submission, the terms of reference are referring to teacher librarians.

The above definitions of a school library and a teacher librarian are utilised in this submission.

In the context of this background, it is recognised that school libraries and the professional people who staff them confront many challenges. One of these challenges is to find an effective way to educate students in this time of rapid change in information and communication technologies.

QCEC response to the terms of reference

The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities.
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Funding

Within the larger Australian Government funded *Building the Education Revolution*, the *Primary school for the 21st Century (P21)* program element has impacted on primary school libraries. For Catholic primary schools or schools with a primary section, in Queensland (221 schools in total), it is confirmed that all will have a contemporary library by the end of 2011. For this element of the *Building the Education Revolution* the Catholic primary schools in Queensland, will expend \$496 million. No Catholic secondary schools in Queensland received funding for library upgrade under the *Building the Education Revolution*.

The Digital Education Revolution has a focus on technology and learning in secondary schools, with Year 9 to 12 students being provided with computers through the National Secondary Schools Computer Fund (NSSF). Some schools may choose to deploy NSSF computers through the school library and this again has implications for library organisation and management.

Whilst the library building is significant in the services provided by the library the role of the library in the school is much more complex. Improved library buildings will not translate into improvements in library services and learning outcomes, unless there is adequate resourcing, staffing, programming, management and administrative support. Over the last decade, resourcing and staffing levels of libraries have fallen despite research that shows libraries with quality library programs enable higher student achievement.

Employment

Library staffing arrangements vary across Catholic schooling authorities in Queensland. Staffing schedules used by some Catholic schooling authorities do not explicitly identify a role of teacher librarian, rather identifying global staffing allocations to be refined and further determined in terms of roles at school level.

In the rural Dioceses there is greater diversity of practice in the employment of teacher librarians. This is also, in part, influenced by the lack in availability of suitably qualified personnel. Across the state few Catholic schools in rural areas have a teacher librarian in a full time capacity.

Curriculum change impacts

Queensland Schools are being impacted by a number of national and state initiatives. Ideally there should be a strong relationship between the school library and the curriculum being implemented. Thus, the implications of the following curriculum changes are highlighted for the Inquiry's consideration.

The draft Australian Curriculum, currently under consultation for English, history, science and mathematics, will require quality resourcing and the capacity to cater for students with a wide variety of needs, including a diversity of reading levels and learning styles. Teachers and students of history will need access to relevant and appropriate primary history sources. The Australian science curriculum seeks to develop an ability to investigate questions using inquiry methods, an ability to communicate scientific understandings and findings, and an ability to solve problems and make informed evidence based decisions.

The Smarter Schools National Partnerships will also impact on curriculum change in schools. The Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership focuses on improving student literacy and numeracy achievement. Reformed strategies for improvement include teacher support to develop enhanced skills in these two areas. The potential for school libraries and school librarians to deliver literacy leadership programs and training, to build strong leadership and effective teams, and to renew and focus on curriculum, is increasing.

At the State level, the Queensland Government's Consultative Green Paper, *A Flying Start for Queensland Children* (currently under discussion) is proposing the introduction of Year 7 into secondary schools. The addition of an extra stream of students to the secondary schools in Queensland may result in an expansion of secondary school libraries, while the reduction in size of primary schools may also have impacts on their library services.

The future potential of school libraries and teacher librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy.

Teacher Librarian role

Teacher librarians have a four strand role to:

- provide curriculum support to teachers in the form of collaborative and cooperative planning
- promote and foster a love of reading and literature

- have a knowledge of literacies of many varieties including digital, information, visual, multi-modal
- manage the resources.

Research¹ indicates that the expertise of the teacher librarian can contribute substantially to improved literacy outcomes if the librarian's expertise is recognised, valued and utilised through school structures, systems and procedures.

A school library, under efficient management, may contribute to improved student outcomes in a number of ways:

- the school library is a central point for the collaborative and cooperative planning of the school curriculum
- a strong computer network links the library to all classrooms such that students and staff have access to information regardless of their location in the school
- the hardcopy collection housed in the library supports the needs of the curriculum, is current and easily accessible
- the teacher librarian is an information specialist and is able to support teachers in their academic delivery
- the teacher librarian works as a leader in promoting reading within and beyond the curriculum, and involves both staff and students
- the fiction collection reflects the interests of the students, their reading abilities, contains recent publications and favoured authors
- the teacher librarian becomes a leader in promoting information and communication technologies and offering a supportive environment to teach other staff
- the teacher librarian is innovative and up to date with the latest happenings in technology and its impact on curriculum delivery.

Research by the Ohio Educational Library and Media Association (OELMA, 2004) shows libraries increase learning outcomes for students.² This research supports that already cited by ASLA, that school libraries are changing from places of hard copy resourcing to ones where students actively engage in their learning through access to print collections, electronic data bases and the world wide web. The OELMA findings speak of school libraries being not just an 'information space but also a knowledge space' for students. Future considerations may need to include research that will clarify how such knowledge spaces are formed.

The quality of school library programs can vary due to:

- staffing provision, including aide and library specialist provision
- resourcing and funding of the school library
- unclear goals
- timetabling structures and access to technology
- administration support from the principal and leadership team

¹ www.asla.org.au/research/ ,2001 -2008, 17 research reports available online

² Todd,R, Kuhlthau,C., & OELMA. (2004) *Student Learning through Ohio SchoolLibraries:The Ohio Research Study*

- systemic support with resources and guidelines, clear descriptions of the elements required of library programs, similar to those provided for subject areas

Roles in school libraries vary greatly depending on school size, other staffing, the age of students and school resources. Roles currently performed by school librarians include to varying degrees:

1. Librarian- cataloguing, processing, organization, copyright
2. Multi-media specialist e.g. cameras, editing, publishing
3. IT support, integration, access, software for improving educational outcomes including Web 2.0 and 3.0 tools
4. Curriculum support
5. Implementation and design of information skills program
6. Implementation and design of reading/literature program
7. Educational leadership including teambuilding, collaboration with staff and students, school planning and policy input, and problem solving skills
8. Manager of staff, budget, self, time, resources, facility, marketing and public relations
9. Teacher, modeling good pedagogy, and engaging students in learning through inquiry, active learning and effective instructional methods
10. Learner, keeping abreast of changes in information and education, sharing these with the school community, implementing best practice to meet particular learning needs.

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians.

Teacher librarians require post graduate qualifications, in recognition of the increasingly complex world of information and knowledge with which school libraries with the teacher librarians and learners are engaged. A teacher librarian holds recognised teaching qualifications and qualifications in librarianship.

The Australian School Library Association standards articulate the professional knowledge of 'excellent teacher librarians' as having an understanding of the principles of lifelong learning, knowledge about learning and teaching across curriculum areas and developmental levels, a rich understanding of school community and curriculum and a specialist knowledge of information, resources, technology and library management. The teaching element of the teacher librarian role brings most value to staff and students. The core value of the role lies in teaching.

Training may be required to develop staff without teacher librarian qualifications in library management and program delivery.

Currently, only a limited number of universities offer a Masters program in teacher librarianship. Consideration might be given to teacher librarianship as a major in undergraduate education degrees. Courses specifically designed to allow librarians to become teacher librarians could be considered.

Employment of appropriate staff in school libraries is requires careful consideration. While appropriate qualifications are preferable, the real necessity is in locating and employing staff able to manage a school library program effectively. Each school differs considerably and the role is very dependent on the ability to learn from experience and to apply library principles to the particular school context.

The shortage of qualified teacher librarians is verging on critical levels, as is witnessed in the above case study. This experience of one Catholic school is not dissimilar to that of many schools.

The Australian School libraries Research Project: A snapshot of Australian school libraries, 2008 Report 1 revealed:

In a Catholic school (prosperous mining and agricultural town/mid – Central Queensland) the school experienced great difficulty in staffing the school library. In a period from 1997 -2010, five people were responsible for the school library with the following qualifications profile:

- *Qualified teacher librarian (3years)*
- *School officer with no library qualification (3 years)*
- *Qualified teacher supervising the library (1 year)*
- *Fully qualified municipal librarian (4 years)*
- *School officer with no library qualifications (1year+)*

- Over 50% of respondents indicated that they had acquired their qualification before 1995
- 50% acquired their qualifications before the birth of *www* and the global changes brought about by ICTs in the area of information management
- Over 50% of surveyed schools indicate no professional staff or less than one FTE working in the library
- 88% of teacher librarians are aged 40+, 55% are aged 55+

The diminishing numbers of teacher librarians in schools is a result of several complex, interacting factors including constrained school staffing budgets and resource allocation decisions in schools.

Catholic education authorities value the role of teacher librarian but processes for identifying teachers for relief and contract employment sometimes make it difficult for principals to organise leave replacements and to develop an appropriate list of available teacher librarians. The shortage of teacher librarians in itself means it can be difficult in rural areas to obtain the services of a qualified teacher librarian for continuing employment, let alone relief employment.

Challenges

- Some teacher librarians point to the absence of clear guidelines about what should be incorporated in school library programs. They contend that the teacher librarian role is not as clearly articulated via subject syllabus and curriculum documents as that of the generalist teacher. Effective curriculum support is dependent on the teacher librarian's understanding of essential learnings across the curriculum. Teacher librarians indicate that it is beneficial for the school to have a clear vision and articulated goals with regard to library programs

Teacher librarians also need to be clear and plan information literacy and literature programs. The priority is implementing a library program designed with a scope and sequence to suit student developmental needs and collaboratively planned with teachers to give the greatest benefit to the school community

- At present, many teacher librarians believe they are duplicating procedures developed at every other school. They see great potential for support of teacher librarian networks to facilitate efficient and effective procedures and document development. Similarly, they see much room for centralized provision of resources; library procedure documents could be developed centrally enabling each school could modify to suit their own needs.
- Inadequate budget and lack of aide support is seen as hindering the contribution of some teacher librarians.
- Some teacher librarians do need to be more flexible. They approach their role with lists of things they "don't do". While a negative response may be valid in some instances, there also needs to be reasonable flexibility on the part of teacher librarians.³ There needs to be some flexibility in meeting the needs of their schools and supporting their administration, just as the administration should be supportive of their role.
- Some teacher librarians completed qualifications many years ago and have not changed their perspective of the role since graduation. Some teacher librarians have not progressed their professional learning. This may have been exacerbated by local school constraints. Acceptance by school administration and staff that time for teacher librarian professional learning will need on occasion to be given a priority.
- Some teacher librarians avoid teaching, yet this should be the core of the role.

³ An example was given of potential refusal to teach Year 8 if the librarian was a primary teacher librarian. This represents an extreme.

The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians.

Community Support

Many teacher librarians in urban and rural areas have commented on the strong relationship which exists between council libraries and school libraries. The Queensland State Library and institutions such as the Queensland Museum have been noted as very supportive and helpful in the supply of resources and technology to urban and rural schools. At the same time, the changing nature of the “book” library is impacting on school partnerships with some support agencies. QCEC was recently informed of the discontinuation of the Queensland Department of Education and Training “Access Club” which provided member schools from all sectors with postal access to books and resources held in the central library. Economic viability and access to electronic resources were cited as reasons for closing the service.

Tertiary Institutions

Opportunities for a diverse approach to achieving teacher librarian qualification might provide an increase in graduates. This would also increase pre-service awareness of the role of the teacher librarian.

Professional Organisations

The Australian School Library Association (ASLA& ALEA) has developed an excellent document, *Learning for the Future*. The inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools could use this document in the development of a national statement on the resourcing of libraries.

The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.

In previous times, the teacher librarian was often the person on staff who had the technical skill and the curriculum knowledge to support teachers in accessing new technologies in an educationally sound way. Whilst others in schools have acquired such expertise, the role of the teacher librarian in the information management continues to be a strong focus in schools. The speed of technological changes and the explosion of electronic resources has made access to information easier and the ability to properly process and use this information even more critical. This needs to be a fundamental role of the 21st century teacher librarian.

Many teachers, including teacher librarians from Catholic schools in Queensland have attended professional learning sessions with Jamie McKenzie. In his article *Why We Still Need Libraries and Librarians*⁴ Jamie Mc Kenzie clearly outlines how

⁴ McKenzie, Jamie, *Why we still need Libraries and Librarians* <http://fno.org/mar2010/still.html>

school librarians have an important role in teaching effective use of digital technologies. He refers to:

- Skills needed to manage information over abundance- to define what is needed and identify the problem, locate and select suitable information, analyse and synthesize information, and use digital presentation tools
- The need to evaluate quality and veracity of online information
- Skills in using information without copying and pasting, to give credit and not plagiarise, referencing correctly
- Skills in searching in a time effective manner by keywords, and other techniques, and using appropriate search tools and filters
- Assistance with comprehending the information and collecting it – note taking, skimming, scanning
- Selecting technology tools that most effectively enhance learning from the abundance of new technologies available
- Teaching how to access the deep/hidden internet and databases
- Using digital technologies to engage learners
- Supporting students in their appropriate use of technologies, including social networking sites
- Assisting with teaching safe internet use
- Supporting classroom teachers with useful digital technology resources to enhance learning.

QCEC makes the following recommendations to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training.

That the Australian Government:

- 1. Address the current shortfall of qualified teacher librarians**
- 2. Give national priority to the professional learning and support of teacher librarians**
- 3. Fund the development of a national infrastructure of digital/online materials ensuring equitable access for all students, teachers, and school communities**
- 4. Allocate funding to research changes necessary in the school library for the 21st century. Then use the research recommendations to provide capital funding for schools to build/renovate school libraries appropriately.**

References

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